A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED

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IN

ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL,

BEFORE THE

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OF

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A

DISCOURSE, &c.

GAL. vi. 2.

Bear ye one another's burthens, and ſo fulfil the law of Chriſt.

ONE argument of the divine origin of the chriſtian religion, is it's benevolent ſpirit and tendency; though, to a partial obſerver, it is no wonder if it ſhould ſometimes appear in a different point of view, and preſent an aſpect unfriendly to the happineſs of mankind. He who rejects every thing that oppoſes the gratification of his paſſions, will of courſe be prejudiced againſt it, and will eaſily conclude, that a ſyſtem, ſo unfavourable to his peculiar propenſities, muſt be abſolutely incompatible with felicity.

But this were to advance too rapidly to the concluſion. Chriſtianity is certainly a

moſt benevolent ſyſtem; nor is it's ſtrictneſs any proof of the contrary. Were our purſuits always influenced by reaſon and religion; was there no defect in the judgment, nothing vicious or diſorderly in our paſſions and affections, the conſequence were inevitable, that we ought not to be controlled; and that to lay any reſtraint upon our inclinations, muſt have a direct tendency to deſtroy our peace.

But this ſuppoſition is confuted by facts. The ſcriptures declare, and experience confirms the doctrine, that there is a defect in our moral conſtitution; that the human mind is conſiderably deranged; that paſſion, inſtead of being ſubſervient, is but too often contrary to reaſon; and that thoſe powers, which ought to be in ſubjection, acquiring a fatal aſcendency, have an influence the reverſe of what we naturally expect; deſtroying, inſtead of promoting our welfare, and involving the whole man in anarchy and confuſion.

Hence it is, that a divine revelation could not but lay us under reſtraints. It muſt inculcate, as one of it's firſt and moſt eſſen-

tial principles, that man is not the maſter of himſelf; that the Almighty does not leave us to our own determinations; that to conſult no law but our own deſires, is the certain road to infamy and ſorrow; and that chriſtianity proves itſelf a ſyſtem worthy of God, and exactly ſuited to the neceſſities of mankind, not by flattering their vices, but by reproving them; not becauſe it propoſes to render them happy, by the indulgence of their inclinations, but becauſe it teaches the government and regulation of them; gives a check to the wild ſallies of inordinate deſire, fixes bounds to the intemperance of paſſion, and reſtrains it within the narrow limits of truth and duty.

Chriſtianity is not confined to negatives. It is a religion not merely harmleſs and inoffenſive. It extends to poſitive excellence; and to that too which is of the higheſt and pureſt kind. In the duties it enjoins, the motives it urges, the principles it eſtabliſhes, and the ſanctions by which they are enforced, it is as much ſuperior to every other ſyſtem, as the heavens are higher than the earth.

To ſay of this religion, that it teaches piety, charity, ſobriety, and every excellence, of which human nature, under the divine influence, is capable, were to ſay little, in compariſon of what it deſerves. It not only inculcates whatever is moſt uſeful and amiable, but it does ſo, upon the beſt and moſt liberal principles. It recommends obedience to the will of God as a matter of duty, which is increaſed and heightened by the divine benefits. From the great arguments of creation and redemption, of providence and of grace, it lays a claim upon our gratitude; engrafts upon gratitude, reverence and affection; and deduces the mercies of God, as the moſt cogent argument, the moſt forcible of inducements, to engage us to preſent to him our ſouls and bodies, as "a lively and reaſonable ſacrifice; to love him with all our heart, and ſerve him with all our ſtrength."

If we conſider religion in the attentions it inculcates to each other, and in the principle on which they are eſtabliſhed, we ſhall find it equally worthy our admiration and eſteem. As the firſt of duties is the love of God; the ſecond, which reſembles and is

derived from it, is the love of mankind. "Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy ſtrength; aud thy neighbour as thyſelf."

Between theſe two fundamental doctrines of chriſtianity, and indeed of all religion, rightly underſtood, there is an obvious connexion. They are plainly united together. The obſervance of one neceſſarily infers the obſervance of the other. There is no real benevolence without piety, and no piety without benevolence. He that loveth God, muſt love his brother alſo: and nothing can be more evident than the reaſoning of the apoſtle; if a man "love not his brother, whom he hath ſeen, how ſhall he love God, whom he hath not ſeen?"

This being premiſed, let it be obſerved, that religion in general, and in this paſſage in particular, is not contrary to reaſon. When it is ſaid, "thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf," it is plainly intimated, that ſelf love is prior to that of our neighbour, ſince it is laid down as the model of it. "No man hateth his own fleſh; but, on the con-

trary, loveth and cheriſheth it." It is equally obvious, that no man can love another in the ſame degree, though he may with the ſame ſincerity, and, in other reſpects, in the ſame manner that he loves himſelf. We have a more lively intereſt in our own concerns, than in thoſe of another; conſequently we feel more ſenſibly every thing that befalls us: and this is eſtabliſhed by the ſame law of nature, which has rendered it a fixed and immutable principle, that it is impoſſible to be as intimately preſent to another as we are to ourſelves.

We may obſerve farther, that as ſelf love muſt of neceſſity precede that of our neighbour, ſo the excellency of religion is proved, among other things, by this conſideration, that it alone can regulate our ſelf love, and our benevolence to mankind; ſince it is religion alone that can inſpire us with juſt views of our duties and conditions, whether relative or perſonal. The obligations of mankind, when left to the mere light of nature, and when enlightened by the ſuperior luſtre of a divine revelation, muſt be immenſely different. In the latter caſe, there is no excuſe for ignorance and inattention. Every

one may be informed of the will of God concerning him, and has the beſt opportunity of being inſtructed in the proſecution of his moſt important intereſts, by ſerving God in his generation, in the cultivation of thoſe tempers, and in the practice of thoſe duties, without which we cannot enter into his kingdom. To ſtudy the divine will, to make our conduct ſubſervient to it, to cheriſh the diſpoſitions of religion, having in us "the mind that was in Chriſt Jeſus, and walking as he alſo walked," is, in the proper ſenſe of the word, to love ourſelves, and the only ſecurity for the true, rational love of our neighbour; and it is no breach of charity to ſay, that he who does not thus ſhew his regard for his own intereſt, can never be a lover of mankind, nor ever be ſenſible of an intereſt in their welfare.

It is no reflection on this inſtitution*, that it is founded on the natural principle of ſelf preſervation. The way of life in which providence hath placed you, is of all others, the moſt diſtinguiſhed by uncertainty and danger. Purſuing your occupation on the great waters, and expoſed to the various calamities

* The Friendly Aſſociation.

of ſo precarious a condition, it was certainly a judicious conduct, to make it, as much as poſſible, a common cauſe; to eſtabliſh a general fund, for the neceſſities of ſickneſs and the infirmities of age, and to prepare, in ſome degree, for future contingencies.

The meaſure is ſurely worthy the higheſt commendation. You have provided, by this means, not only for yourſelves, in caſe of ſickneſs, or of any accident, by which you may be rendered incapable of proſecuting your uſual employments; but you have alſo made ſome proviſion for thoſe, in whoſe welfare you are ſo intimately concerned, your wives and your children. Providence has favoured the undertaking. Your ſtock has increaſed in a proportion, not indeed equal to the merit of the project, but perhaps greater than could have been expected: and it may juſtly be preſumed, that a ſociety, formed, as this is, on the moſt obvious principles of expediency and general utility, will daily increaſe, as it ought, in numbers and in opulence.

Inſtitutions of this nature, if conducted on right principles, and managed with pru-

dence and regularity, have a tendency perfectly congenial with the ſpirit of religion. Chriſtianity teaches us to ſympathiſe with one another; to "weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice; to bear each other's burthens, and ſo fulfil the law of Chriſt." True religion is diſtinguiſhed, not merely by a proper attention to our own intereſt and welfare, but alſo to that of others. It teaches us not only to be ſober and temperate, but to be compaſſionate and benevolent; to "viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourſelves unſpotted from the world."

Such alſo is the tendency of aſſociations like the preſent. Familiar intercourſe with each other, under prudent regulations, is of courſe productive of mutual affection and eſteem. The ſhyneſs, which is more general than could reaſonably be expected in a civilized country, preſently vaniſhes on a more intimate acquaintance. The affections dilate and expand within the ſocial circles; and a thouſand tenderneſſes flouriſh, which had been loſt and buried in the gloom of ſolitude and abſtraction.

The chief danger, on ſuch occaſions, is the temptation to intemperance. We are not always ſufficiently on our guard; and, in the warmth of converſation, and the hilarity of ſocial intercourſe, we are too apt to forget the chriſtian character, and the example of the founder of our moſt holy religion. But let us remember, that all exceſs is criminal and unchriſtian; that it is equally hurtful to the body and the ſoul; and, in the ſame proportion that it inflames the paſſions, injures the underſtanding. Sobriety, in every ſenſe of the word, both as it relates to the government of our minds, and the regulation of our manners, is an eſſential branch of chriſtianity.

Another conſideration of importance is, that local inſtitutions and particular aſſociations ſhould never leſſen our benevolence to mankind in general. We are "members one of another." Every man ſhould conſider himſelf as a citizen of the world, and extend his regards beyond his own circle, to every individual of mankind. Whenever we ſee a man, we ſee a brother. It is no matter what is his country, or what his religion; nor indeed, in this reſpect, does it

make any difference, whether he be a chriſtian or an infidel. The Father of us is the Father of the whole human race. He makes none of thoſe diſtinctions, which have ſo long furniſhed fuel to the diſſentions and animoſities of mankind; and though his peculiar regards are directed to the excellent of the earth, yet he does not fail to ſhower down his benefits on the evil, as well as on the good; and is alike merciful to the juſt and the unjuſt.

This diſcourſe cannot more properly be cloſed, than by addreſſing you with a view to your peculiar ſituation. The author of the pſalms, in the ſublimeſt ſtrain of accurate and beautiful deſcription, has given a lively repreſentation of the dangers to which you are expoſed, and the frequent and ſudden reverſes you muſt experience. "They that go down to the ſea in ſhips, that do buſineſs in great waters; theſe ſee the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep." There is no condition of life without it's dangers: but it muſt be acknowledged, that your's is peculiarly ſubject to peril and accident; and you may ſay, with perhaps more propriety than others, that in

life you are "in the midſt of death." It is true, that your concerns, as well as thoſe of all mankind, are in the hands of God; and that if you love and ſerve him, you may chearfully confide in his mercy, and in the utmoſt rage of the elements, and amid the roarings of the boiſterous flood, commit your ſouls and bodies to his protection, as into the hands of a merciful and faithful Creator. But you cannot expect his protection, nor truſt in him in the moment of danger, unleſs your conduct is regulated by religious principle.

The ſcenes through which you muſt paſs, and the ſuddenneſs of the dangers you muſt frequently encounter, plainly indicate the neceſſity of cultivating the ſpirit of religion, and ſeeking an intereſt in him, who, "ſitting above the waterfloods, remaineth a king for ever," and is alone able to ſave you in the time of trouble. While the deliverances you muſt repeatedly have experienced are ſurely calculated to excite ſentiments of gratitude to that divine power, who can command the tempeſt to ruffle the boſom of the deep; or, with equal eaſe, can bid the ſtorm ſubſide into a calm, and force it's boi-

ſterous billows to be ſtill. "He commandeth, and raiſeth the ſtormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their ſoul is melted becauſe of trouble. They reel to and fro, and ſtagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their diſtreſſes. He maketh the ſtorm a calm, ſo that the waves thereof are ſtill. Then they are glad, becauſe they be quiet; ſo he bringeth them unto their deſired haven." The concluſion of this ſublime paſſage is as ſtriking as it is natural and juſt. Though difficulty and danger, and deliverances frequently repeated, do not always promote piety, this at leaſt is their deſign and tendency. If there be any, who ought to be more ſerious and religious than the reſt of the world, it is he who ſeeks his bread upon the great waters. A pious, chriſtian conduct, and an humble reliance on the divine Providence ought ever to diſtinguiſh ſuch from all mankind. They are particularly called upon to "praiſe the Lord for his goodneſs, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." Now to God, &c.

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